

1730 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W. (House)
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS No. DC-462

HABS
DC,
WASH,
SSO-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HABS
DC,
WASH,
550-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

1730 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE, N. W. (HOUSE) HABS No. DC-462

Location: 1730 Massachusetts Avenue, N. W. , Washington, District of Columbia.

Present Owner: Private.

Significance: The renovation of the facade of 1730 Massachusetts Avenue in 1914, represents a pivotal point in the change from the late Victorian style to the Beaux Arts style which marked the character of Massachusetts Avenue.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

On August 8, 1914 a building permit was issued to Sylvanus Stokes, owner, for the renovation of 1730 Massachusetts Avenue and the building of an entirely new facade. Construction and renovation took six months, from September 1914 to January 1915. The new facade represents a pivotal point in the change from the late Victorian to the Beaux-Arts style which marked the character of Massachusetts Avenue. Only three buildings remain of the pre-1900 period, all of substantial size, executed in red brick or red sandstone or both. New dwellings built during the early twentieth century featured less dramatic color and French or Italianate detail.

In style 1730 Massachusetts Avenue is French, in the Louis XVI neoclassical mode. Its rectilinear manner is characteristic of Edwardian execution generally wherein stylistic elements are used within a rigid framework. Sculptural detail has been scaled down to the tightly drawn skin of the building which fully occupies the width of the lot. In formal composition, color, and material 1730 echoes the much larger houses, now the Canadian Embassy and Sulgrave Club, located nearby, executed in limestone and roman buff brick.

The facade presents three stories. The basement of 11' 3" is executed in grey Indiana limestone deeply scored. Matching set of French doors symmetrically flank the lowered entrance which is 9' wide. The design of the black cast-iron double door repeats in slightly modified form the gently arched transom bars of the French doors. Some repair work is visible where the marquise of 1915 was removed. Three limestone steps descend to a drive-in and parking area. The facade is 35 feet from the sidewalk line.

The two floors above the basement are of buff-colored Roman brick. The piano nobile has 5 sets of French doors set in openings 4' wide and 10' 6" high, finished by flat arches executed in brick with elongated limestone keystones. Pale yellow woodwork sets off the black of the flush wrought-iron balconies, each of which has a cartouche of black cast-iron. The cartouche consists of an unadorned convex shield framed by branches having a salon pattern. Two foot six inches above the top of the window frames are five double hung windows, 5' 10" high, with pale yellow woodwork and a plain entablature. The cornice, decorated with 5 raised roundels, is painted the same pale yellow and topped by an attic balustrade, 4' 9" in height, in brick with limestone balconies.

The architect, Alexander H. Sonnemann, was a prominent member of the group of local architects who practiced architecture according to the popularized rules of Beaux-Arts style adopting historic forms to domestic use with taste, proportion, and restraint. Sonnemann had no formal training but learned the profession from his father, Ottmar Sonnemann, an engineer-architect who had worked on the construction of the Capitol dome and the Library of Congress. In 1895, at the age of 23, the son entered practice in Washington.

Sonnemann practiced for some years with Louis Justement as a member of the firm Sonnemann and Justement and was a member of the American Institute of Architects. He was one of a number of architects who participated in the great suburban expansion of Washington from DuPont Circle to Chevy Chase Circle, working for developers, creating houses and apartments in flat, facile variant of popular styles. Among his other works are the Kennedy-Warren on Connecticut Avenue, Kew Gardens on Q Street, and the Kenwood Golf and Country Club together with a number of houses in the Kenwood area. (Source: Evening Star, April 27, 1956, A-22)

This documentation was donated to the Historic American Buildings Survey by the National Trust for Historic Presentation. The historical data was compiled by Cynthia Fields in order to certify the structure as a National Trust easement property.